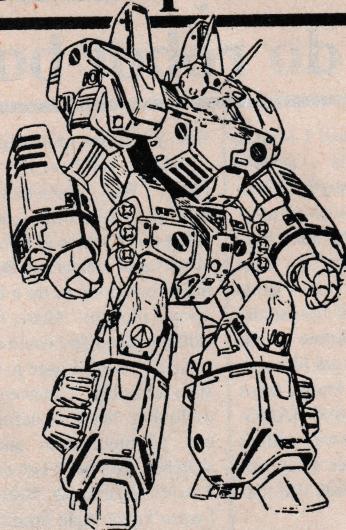


# "My job as producer of ROBOTECH is



# CARL MACEK

**A**nyone intimately involved with comics over the past ten years or so should have at least a fleeting awareness of the name Carl Macek, which has appeared in the pages of the shortlived Seaboard/Atlas line of comics in the mid-Seventies, as well as turning up here and there in ads for a California comic art gallery and — most recently — as the writer of Comico's MACROSS comic book and producer of the ROBOTECH syndicated cartoon series.

Since robo-mania is sweeping the country, from the pages of comics to the shelves of toy stores to the Saturday morning television screen, it seemed high time we found out all about the high tech Japanese/American MACROSS/ROBOTECH animated series that's been singled out by so many as an example of the best the field has to offer — while also taking the opportunity to learn more about the mysterious man known as Macek.

Shel Dorf was singled out for this behind-the-scenes story, and his conversation with Carl follows...

**SHEL DORF:** Carl, you don't draw, you don't write — or do you write? — yet you're in animation. You find yourself suddenly a producer of the ROBOTECH syndicated cartoon series for American television. How did you get involved with the project?

**CARL MACEK:** Initially, I was approached by Harmony Gold to handle an aspect of their licensing to the specialty retail market. My efforts resulted in the Comico deal for the adaptation of MACROSS.

## VITAL STATISTICS

**Name:** Carl Macek

**Born:** Pittsburgh, PA — 1951

**Occupation:** Producer

**Favorite Films:** Too many to note here...I just love the Medium of Film.

**Favorite Comics:** Most recently, AMERICAN FLAGG, Simonson's THOR, NEXUS...and scattered issues here and there among the hundreds that are released each month.

**Hobby:** Owning my own art gallery and comic shop so that I can immerse myself in the genre (like Uncle Scrooge in his Money Bins) and get a feeling for what fans are most interested in.

**Goals:** To expand the level of consciousness for executives who control television and motion picture distribution. It is a lifelong ambition for the re-education of people out of touch with popular culture.

**Least Favorite Nickname:** "The Professor" — it stems from a period of work where I was teaching college while doing my graduate work and it seems to have stuck.

The company was impressed by the speed with which the deal was done, and asked if I could do anything besides selling licenses. This opened the door for me to actually try my hand at producing animated television programming.

**SHEL:** You make it sound rather simple...

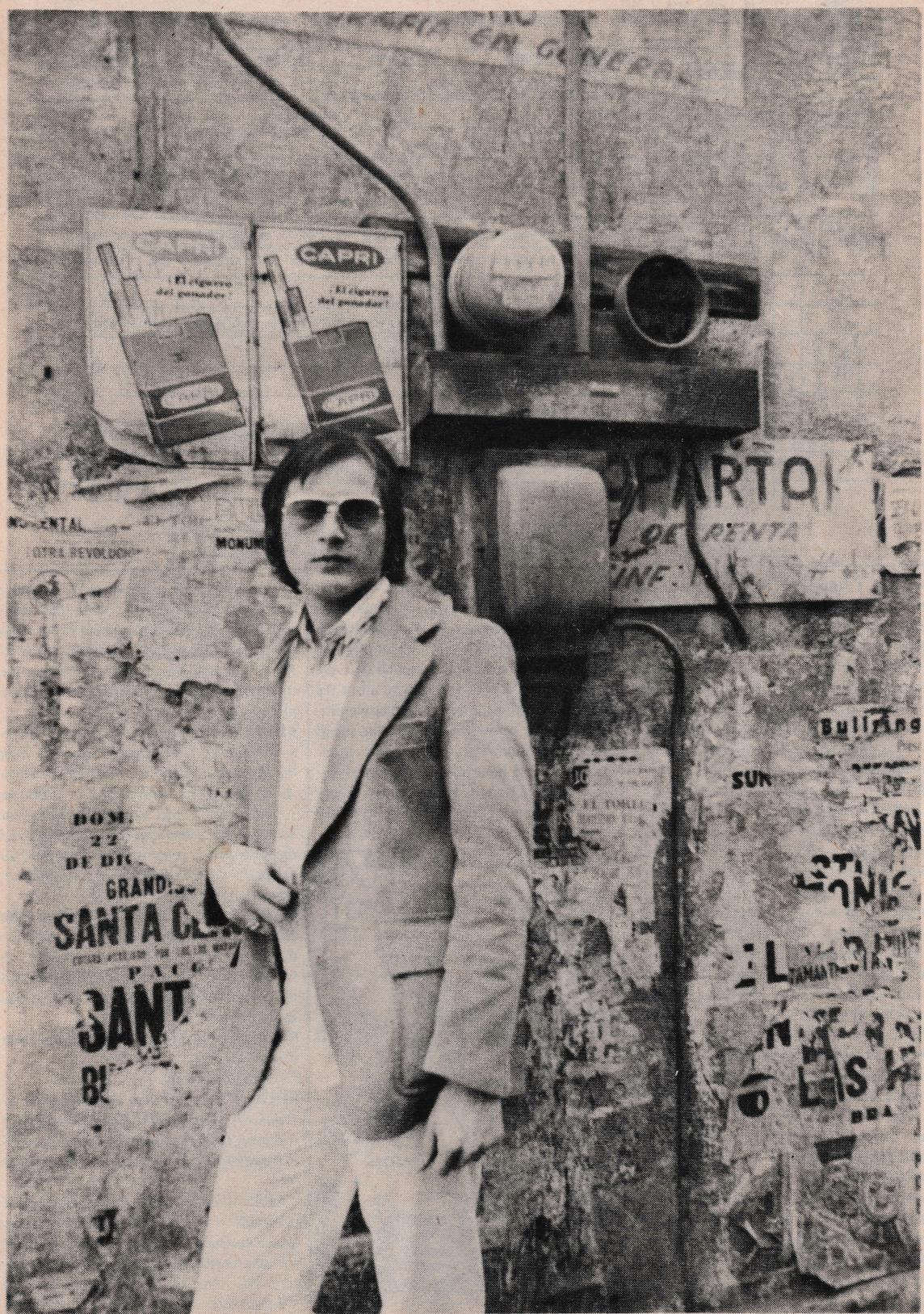
**CARL:** Actually, there were some other considerations. Primarily, the merchandising. We had been talking with Revell, Inc. about a potential co-production deal on the series. They were interested only if the name of the series was changed from MACROSS to something which reflected their new product line of "Robotech" models. After a series of fruitless meetings with corporate heads in Los Angeles and France, it was decided that rather than get involved in a co-production venture, the proposed television series — now called ROBOTECH — would in actuality exist as a co-licensing venture. Complicated but necessary to start the ball rolling for a daily syndicated series which was scheduled to go on the air in less than six months after the agreements had been signed.

**SHEL:** What are your chores as producer of ROBOTECH?

**CARL:** That is fairly complicated but I'll try to make it as simple as possible. Harmony Gold is the leading distributor of animation throughout the world — foreign distribution of animation. We wanted to have an American television program because we

CARL MACEK

**basically to conceptualize the story..."**



# "In L.A. it's the #1 rated show in its time



Story by: CARL MACEK

AUTOMATED DIALOGUE CUE SHEET APPROVED BY: ROBES

4.

COMPANY: MIXER:	DIRECTOR:	PRODUCTION: "MACROSS"	REEL #1	DATE:	STUDIO:
		PART #	SHEET #4		WORK ORDER #
<i>noise chewing / more computer noises - machine noises -</i>					
MIXER NOTES	CHANNEL	TIME CODE START/STOP	CHARACTER	DIALOGUE	
		✓ 21 00:06:31 00:06:32 00:06:34+	GLOVAL:	(GRUFFLY) ALRIGHT-I'LL WAVE.	<i>at 7005 - Necessary?</i>
		✓ 22 00:06:42	NARRATOR:	THE EXCITEMENT IS MOUNTING AS THE COUNTDOWN TO BLASTOFF PROGRESSES. ON BOARD THE GIANT SPACESHIP,	<i>7005</i>
			LISA:	THE CREW IS BUSY WITH THEIR PRE-LAUNCH CHECKLIST.	
		✓ 23 00:06:43 00:06:47	VANESSA:	(OFF/ON) ALL MANUAL SYSTEMS ARE GREEN LIGHT / LET THE COMPUTER RUN ITS OWN CHECKLIST, NOW.	<i>7005</i>
		✓ 24 00:06:48 00:06:54	LISA:	THE CEREMONY STARTS IN FIFTEEN MINUTES - I HOPE THE CAPTAIN GETS HERE IN TIME. I HEAR HE DIDN'T	
				GET MUCH SLEEP LAST NIGHT.	<i>7005</i>
		✓ 25 00:06:55 00:07:02	CLAUDIA:	(SOS) THE OTHER OFFICERS THREW A FAREWELL PARTY FOR HIM. THEY PROBABLY SAT UP ALL NIGHT; TELLING	
				EACH OTHER WAR STORIES. YOU KNOW HOW THEY ARE.	
		✓ 26 00:07:03	LISA:	AND WHERE WERE YOU, CLAUDIA?	
		✓ 27 00:07:05	CLAUDIA:	WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT, LISA?	
		✓ 28 00:07:05	LISA:	HAI.....YOU DIDN'T COME IN UNTIL FOUR THIS MORNING..YOU MUST HAVE BEEN PARTYING, TOO.	
		✓ 29 00:07:11 00:07:15	CLAUDIA:	YOU JEALOUS? I HAD A LATE DINNER WITH CAPTAIN FOKKER...WHAT?	

Carl writes the story synopsis and narration, from which a dialogue writer prepares a script to be recorded (above), which Carl checks for continuity.

were in Europe and South America and Africa and the Far East — we thought it was important to get into the United States. I was hired and given the assignment to create a television series for the U.S. and I looked through the library of material that Harmony Gold had, and there was nothing that was long enough to survive syndication. You need a minimum of 65 episodes to have a syndicated television show.

**SHEL:** Is this a half hour or an hour show?  
**CARL:** A half hour. Sixty-five half hours. In order to do this, I had to combine material that existed in different forms to come up with a minimum of 65 episodes. So what I did was to choose three different series produced by a Japanese studio called Tatsunoko Studios. They are very famous in Japan — the equivalent of Hanna-Barbera in the U.S. They had been producing television shows for 20 to 25 years, and their stuff has always been quite well received; they produced SPEEDRACER in the early '60s, and they produced a lot of children's classics. Most recently they did a series of unique science-fiction programs, one of which — MACROSS — was very successful. Another one of theirs was called SOUTHERN CROSS, and a third one, MOSPEADA. (Mos-pe-a-da is how most people pronounce it.) MACROSS was a fairly successful series. The other two series were not as successful — either commercially or aesthetically. They just didn't hit the nail on the head the way the first series did.

**SHEL:** Were the series related?

**CARL:** What we did was combine these three really diverse series. We peeled away the veneer of the existing story of all three series, kept the spirit of the original Japanese action, and proceeded to rewrite all of the storylines, all of the plots, so that we ultimately came up with an 85 episode series that had continuity — that amounts, in effect, to a 42 1/2 hour mini-series. From episode one to 85 it tells a single story. There are some obvious gaps in continuity to fill in later on but, by and large, it tells a sin-

gle story. My job as producer is basically to conceptualize the story, write that story, give it to a dialogue-replacement writer, who then is skilled enough to manipulate the writing so that dialogue expressed matches the mouth movements of characters who have already been animated.

**SHEL:** I had an opportunity to tour Intersound Studio. Your wife, Svea Stauch, took me through it. I had a chance to see some American voice actors adding dialogue soundtracks. It was explained to me that when you add American voices you wipe out the soundtrack completely, so you have to put back the sound effects. It was quite an amazing process.

**CARL:** It is very difficult to do. Since the character has already been animated, his mouth already moves in a certain way, so we have to find words to match that and also tell a continuous story — a story that has some point.

**SHEL:** So this goes much further than just translating?

**CARL:** Absolutely.

**SHEL:** There must also be a difference in standards as to what the Japanese audience will accept and what will be boring to American audiences. Can you go into that a little bit?

**CARL:** It is not so much the concept of boredom — it is more the concept of cultural awareness. The Japanese have a different cultural attitude by and large than Americans do. One of the problems was to "Westernize" the concepts — to take out



# slot except for ABC NIGHTLY NEWS."

ethnicity that is particularly Japanese and replace it with a Western attitude. You don't understand it, because you don't see it happening when you are just watching it. A lot of the animation has been re-timed using a device called a Bausch Telescene Converter — it is a digital computer. This digital computer-driven film chain can actually re-time the animation. We can make things that might seem dull and boring in the Japanese version seem natural in the Western version. Faster. We can change the pattern of editing. So basically I go in and completely redesign the scene to a pattern that is Westernized. I rebuild a story from scratch. I then give it to a group of writers who then script to the mouth movements. Next, I supervise the selection of voices, the laying down of the tracks, the final assembling of the material, the final remix and the editing. When you do this type of stuff, you do it so fast that it's almost like producing live television.

**SHEL:** So you write the story outlines as well?

**CARL:** Oh yeah.

**SHEL:** But you are not actually writing the screenplay, you give that to others...

**CARL:** I don't have time — I have about 85 people who work for me.

**SHEL:** Eighty-five people? What do these people do?

**CARL:** Writers, directors, actors, mixers, technicians, sound editors, film team editors, video tape editors, vault librarians, *et cetera*. It is a large organization. I have four shifts that work during a given day. Each

shift has an eight-hour day. In a normal working day I have four shifts — so I have 32 hours worth of man-hours, labor intensive work, going on in a single day. In every week, I have 96 hours of production being done.

**SHEL:** That is astonishing. How is it doing?

**CARL:** The show is a remarkable success story, because we are producing a first run syndicated show, and traditionally all of these shows have had ancillary support from toys and television advertising that would plant an awareness into the public as to the identity of the product — like HE-MAN, G.I.JOE, THE TRANSFORMERS — where you see toys and television commercials all along. In ROBOTECH, there are no toys being marketed. There are some imported toys that have come in, but the toy line has not been set to coincide with the release of the ROBOTECH television program so, without all that back-up, the series itself is doing remarkably well.

**SHEL:** I am sure it will happen in a more natural way where the popularity of the show will create a demand for the toys and then the toys will be done.

**CARL:** That is true. In Los Angeles without any ancillary support, it is the number one rated show in its time slot and that beats most of the competitive network and

non-network programs, with the exception of the ABC NIGHTLY NEWS in its time-slot. And ROBOTECH is increasing its viewership.

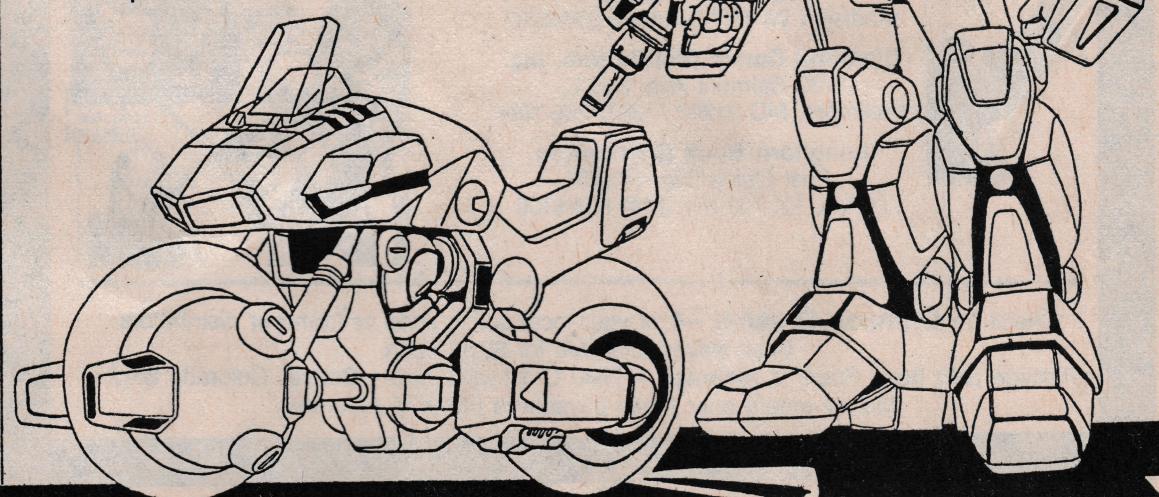
**SHEL:** For those of our readers who haven't seen it, can you give me an idea of what the series is about?

**CARL:** ROBOTECH is a story of the future — how people relate to alien technology initially. It is protracted over an 85 episode cycle which relates to approximately 45 Earth years. So we have three generations of people dealing with problems that will eventually determine whether or not the Earth is destroyed and whether mankind ceases to exist. It has got some fairly significant science fiction elements. It's got a lot of dramatic situations, a lot of romance, a lot of humor. It is not a typical animated television series. It is most equivalent to something like DALLAS in outer space. People have also called it James Michner in outer space. Someone from the HERALD EXAMINER who did a review called it "GASOLINE ALLEY in outer space." It has an appeal which goes beyond your standard half-hour television show — which sets up a situation, has a crisis and a resolution of it all in one episode. Our show doesn't

## Armoured Cyclone and Rider

As illustrated here, the Cyclone can convert into a powerful suit of Armour.

The Weapon Systems used in this transformed mode are quite varied.



"Robotech" TM Reveil, Inc.

© 1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold

# "It's equivalent to DALLAS in outer space."

"Robotech" TM Revell, Inc.

© 1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold

do that — it is more like a continuing comic strip, where every episode there's something new. Not every show has action or serious drama. A lot of it is character development, explanation and what-have-you.

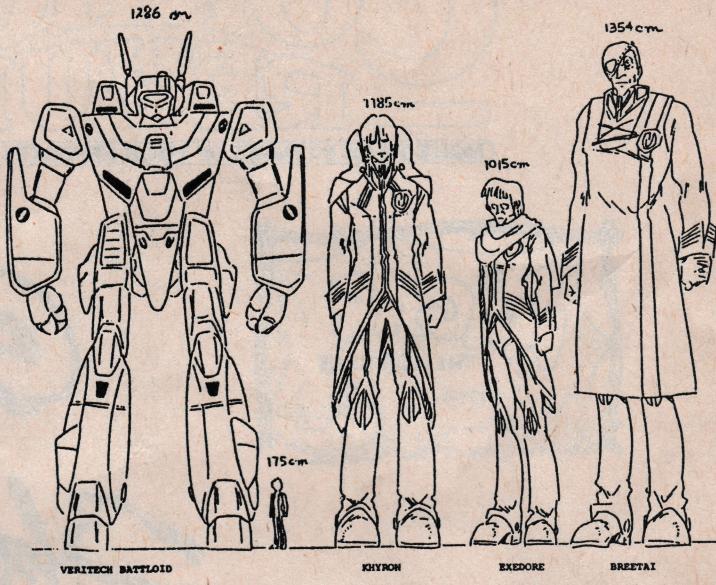
**SHEL:** *It must reach all ages, because I have a friend who is in his mid-twenties and he loves the show. His little boy of three is absolutely crazy about it. They watch it as father and son. They enjoy watching the same thing.*

**CARL:** We kept the spirit that the Japanese had — and that is the most important aspect — it is so enthusiastic and so positive. We didn't emasculate what the Japanese did, we enhanced it. The Japanese are masters of telling stories. We allowed the spirit to come through the Western approach, and it is appealing to a large group of people. It is a universal show.

**SHEL:** *Tell me what some of the problems were and continue to be in combining three different television series to make this one.*

**CARL:** The biggest problem is trying to find continuity that you can pull from the existing images. It is difficult but not impossible. I viewed each series at least a dozen times to discover what things would make sense. I did it without the aid of Japanese translation. I watched it silent — like silent movies. I would make notes of the images that seemed dissimilar and hit upon the whole concept of proto-culture, which is an alien technology generated from plants and is an energy source that is the equivalent of organic fusion — very weird stuff. The use of this proto-culture concept allowed me to tie-in all the three series and is virtually seamless. If you are not a nit-picker, it makes a great deal of sense. Our ultimate plan, because of the success of ROBOTECH, is to go back to the original Tatsunoko Studio and commission all brand-new stuff, based on filled-in continuity gaps in the original plotline of ROBOTECH. We would hopefully end up with 260 episodes, which amounts to one episode per day for an entire year on a Monday through Friday basis, and which is totally novel and new. There has never been anything like this on television for children and once kids are aware of it, they watch it. It is multi-level, the texture of it and the writing is so good, that kids can get into it and watch it again and again. The writers are wonderful. Guys that wrote BONANAZA episodes, guys that wrote for Red Skelton, guys that wrote novels, science fiction. All sorts of people are writing these scripts. It is not your typical cartoon writing. It is intense, dramatic writing or science fiction.

**SHEL:** *Have any of the original Japanese writers or artists viewed your version and commented upon it?*



VERITECH BATTLOID

KHYRON

EXEDORE

BRETAI

**CARL:** Recently, Kenji Yoshida, one of the principal owners of Tatsunoko Studios and one of the producers for the three series that turned into ROBOTECH, was in Los Angeles, viewed what we were doing, and was amazed. For one thing, the Japanese do not have synch. Which means that they never have their actors speak in synch with the mouth movements of the animation.

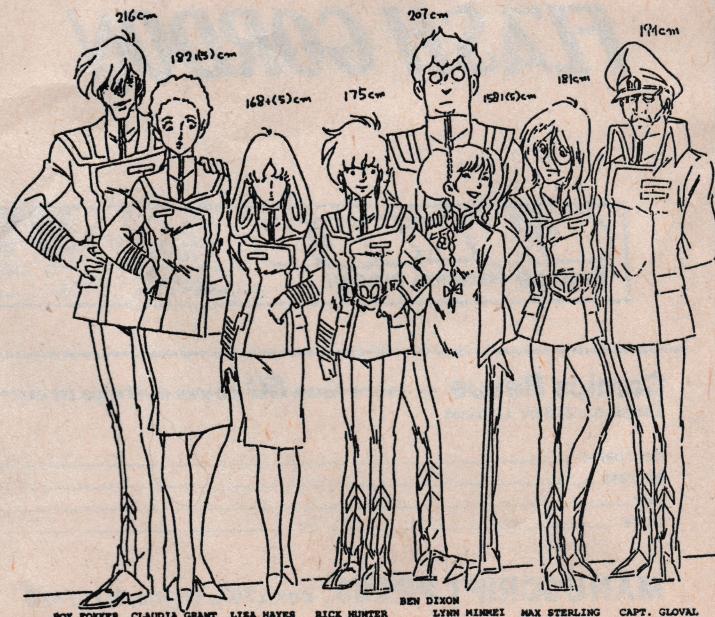
**SHEL:** *That doesn't bother them?*

**CARL:** They don't care. They are more interested in telling the story. Immediately, Kenji Yoshida realized that the thing was in synch — he flipped it that it was in synch.

We have enhanced their sound-effects nearly 2000% — we have 20 times the sound effects that they have done.

**SHEL:** *I was very impressed when it was explained to me that there is even a sound effect for an empty room — that they put a microphone in an empty room which has a particular sound to it, and then add that sound to two men at a table talking, so it sounds like they are in an empty room.*

**CARL:** If you listen to most cartoons, there is none of that attention to detail. Our production has such attention to detail that it is unbelievable. It has presence. It has ambiance. It has ambient sound, it's got Dol-



"Robotech" TM Revell, Inc.

© 1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold

# "It is very adult. There is violence and romance. I'm not going to say sex."

by effects, it's got stuff that is reserved for future films. We are really trying to forge a new way to look at animation as a medium for television.

**Yoshida:** totally impressed with our production, eventually sat down and watched an episode. He doesn't speak English. Sat down, watched it, got into it, was totally enthralled, laughed, giggled, was excited, was scared. When it was over he turned around and said in Japanese to his translator, "This is better than what we did in Japan." He was flipped, totally flipped. The thing that is funny is that there is a group of fans of Japanese animated art in the United States, called "The Cartoon Fantasy Organization," and they get an equal amount of enjoyment out of something that they don't understand the language to. I found it to be an interesting contrast that when the Japanese guy watches his stuff in a foreign language he gets out of it more than what was initially in there for the Japanese, and when the Americans watch it in Japanese they get more out of it than when the Japanese watch it in Japanese. It is a cross cultural curiosity.

**SHEL:** So we have an opportunity for international communication here. Do you sermonize at all in your scripts?

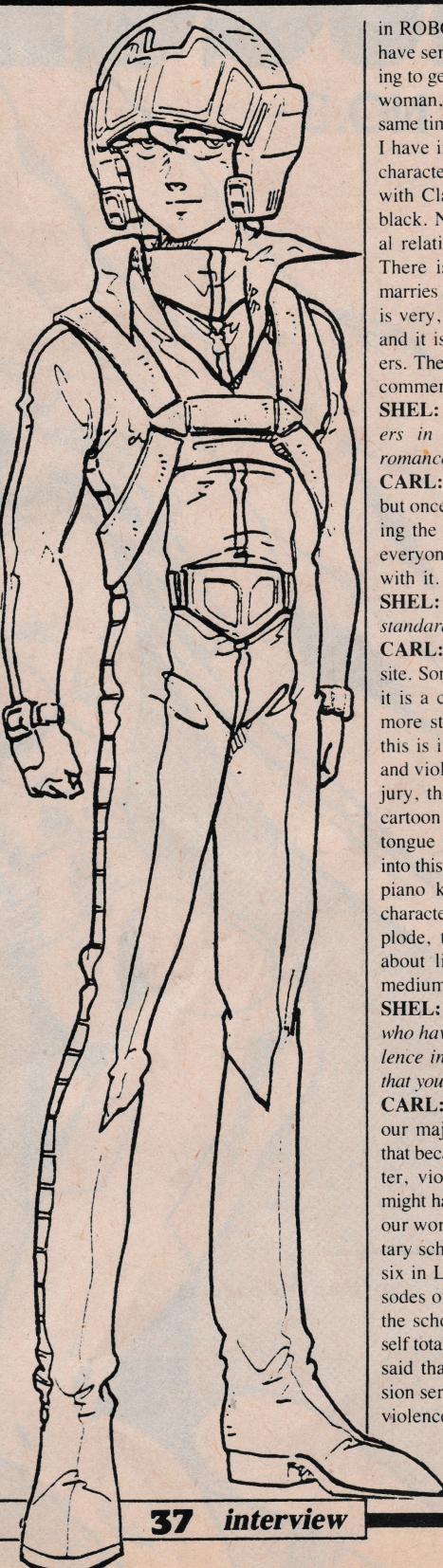
**CARL:** I don't sermonize at all — I create "moral objectives." I don't sermonize like they do on HE-MAN, where they take two minutes out of the end of the show and say, "Now kids, don't drink and drive." "Always have your seatbelt on." We don't deal with that level of moralizing. What we do is create situations that have dramatic implications, and we allow the viewer to make his own judgement. We don't say something is good or bad. We might show someone being really nasty or show someone having a drinking problem, or show someone having a relationship problem. We don't explain the solutions. We let the characters with their own level of intelligence solve their problems or not solve their problems and allow the viewer to decide whether those solutions are the correct choices. It is very adult.

**SHEL:** Let's center on that word. When I see the word "adult," that's another way of saying there is sex and violence in it. Is there much of that in ROBOTECH?

**CARL:** There is violence and romance. I'm not going to say there is sex. There are interpersonal relationships centering on romance and centering on people's perceptions of sexuality — boyfriends, girlfriends, people get married and have babies. A lot of the dramatic implications that take place

© 1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold "Robotech" TM Revell, Inc.

Art © 1985 Comico



in ROBOTECH deal with people trying to have serious relationships. "Am I ever going to get married?" You know, "I love this woman, but I love this other woman at the same time, how do I separate my feelings?" I have interracial relationships. There is a character named Roy Fokker who is in love with Claudia Grant, and Claudia Grant is black. Not only do they have a professional relationship, but they have a romance. There is interspecies romance. A human marries an alien and they have a child, which is very, very esoteric. But it is not obtuse and it is not above the heads of the viewers. They are into it. They write letters, they comment.

**SHEL:** Do you ever get letters from viewers in the South about the interracial romance?

**CARL:** Not really. We had to explain it, but once people see that we are not exceeding the broadcast standards and practices, everyone agrees that there is nothing wrong with it.

**SHEL:** Maybe because it is a cartoon, the standards are not as strict.

**CARL:** Some people would say the opposite. Some people would say that — because it is a cartoon — the standards should be more strict. Our philosophy in producing this is if you show war produces violence and violence produces harm or death or injury, then it is much more realistic than a cartoon that portrays a character getting his tongue pulled out, and letting it roll back into this mouth and having his teeth turn into piano keys. That's unreal. ROBOTECH characters die. Characters get shot, they explode, they die. It has a realistic attitude about life and death, that transcends the medium of animation in the United States.

**SHEL:** Carl, there are groups of parents who have come out actively against the violence in children's television. Do you feel that you have any responsibility in this area?

**CARL:** Oh yeah. I mean, that was one of our major concerns at the time — we felt that because of the nature of the subject matter, violence being part of the series, we might have some problems with that. To test our work, we did a screening at an elementary school which went from grades one to six in Los Angeles. We screened two episodes of ROBOTECH and the principal of the school, a child psychologist, was herself totally overwhelmed and impressed. She said that, for once, producers of a television series created an atmosphere in which violence and war and the nature of survival was done realistically and with great sensi-

# "In American, to see a cartoon character nude would be a cultural shock."

tivity, so that all the children could understand and perceive the nature of violence — such as, if you get into a war or a fight, you stand a chance of being hurt. Which is very honest and remarkable and which she thought was a very good idea.

**SHEL:** What about nude buttocks and breasts, which in Japan are acceptable — did you have to edit them out for the American audiences?

**CARL:** I don't have to edit them out. I do, because of my feeling that we've pushed the limit so far with what we are doing already. The Japanese don't produce nudity for prurient interests. They produce nudity in sequences where people are bathing. It is not sexual. It is merely a function of life. And as you know, bathing is a very significant factor of the Japanese culture. So it is not unusual to see people bathing. In American society, to see a cartoon character nude would be a cultural shock, and force people to just point at it and laugh. It would destroy the whole reason that it is there. So rather than have that situation occur, I eliminated and Westernized the concept so people don't misinterpret what is going on.

**SHEL:** Also, these long zoom shots — I understand Japanese audiences tolerate them, but American audiences get bored as they take a long shot of the character, and then slowly come closer and closer and closer to get a close-up.

**CARL:** My philosophy and television direction in general is to eliminate unnecessary longshots, because on television and especially in animation, longshots are virtually worthless — you don't really see anything. You can set up the scene with medium and close-up shots, which are more effective on television. So we have a standard philosophy of editing which tries to eliminate, whenever possible, unnecessary longshots. The Japanese do it as a standard of editing to make establishing shots, secondary key shots, and what have you — but we don't need that for cartoons, because we explain everything in the dialogue, which the Japanese don't. The Japanese have less dialogue, more visualization. We stress more dialogue, so that we can allow the close-up and medium shots to work better. It's very effective and even the Japanese have begun to recognize that, when they look at what we are doing.

**SHEL:** Carl, do they have commercials on Japanese television?

**CARL:** Oh yes.

**SHEL:** And are there natural commercial breaks?

**CARL:** There are...

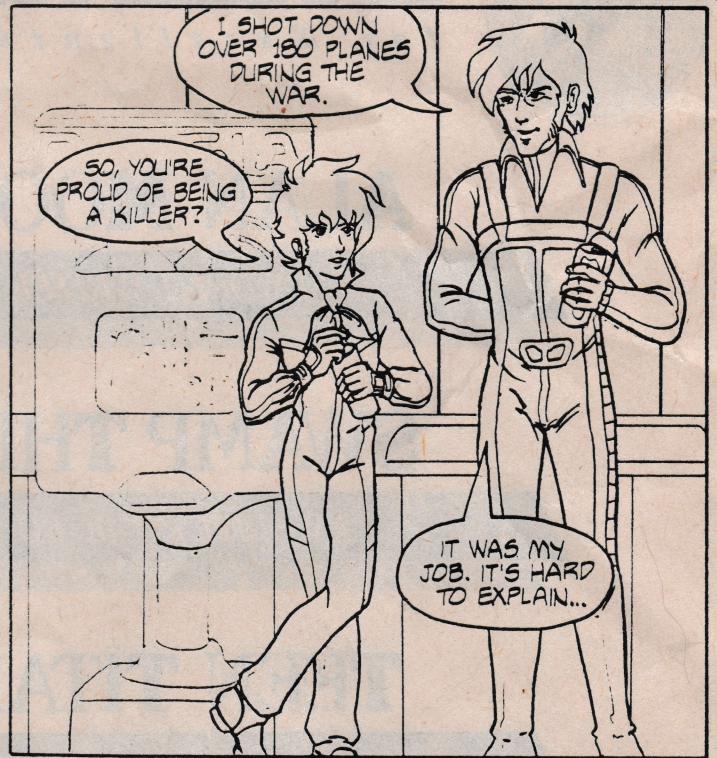
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Art © 1985 Comico

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Rick Hunter and Captain Roy Fokker--from Comico's MACROSS 1.

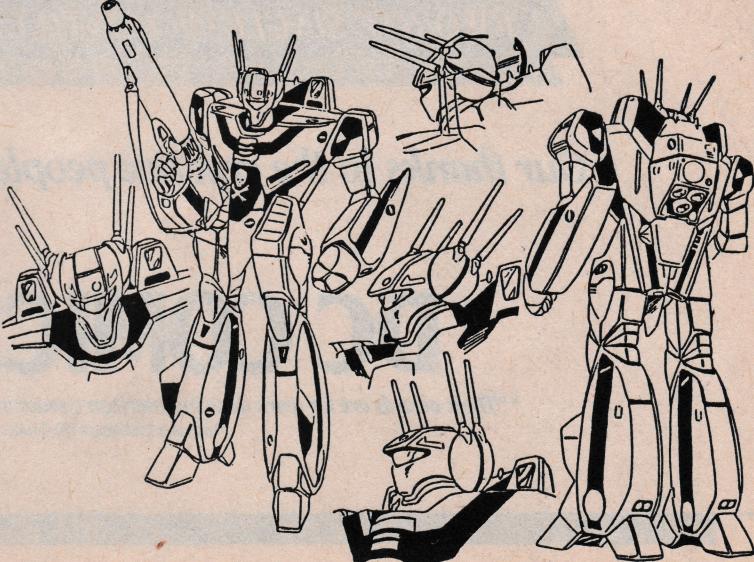
**SHEL:** Little cliffhangers... or do you have to put them in?

**CARL:** Let me explain this very simply. In

cartoons in the United States they generally have three commercial breaks, so it becomes a three-act story, in a half hour. In

## "Roy Fokker's" Veritech Battloid

Variation used  
by the commander of the dreaded  
"Skull Squadron".



# "ROBOTECH is all created from scratch."

Japan, they break in the middle, so they have two acts. I kept that convention because it is better to tell a dramatic story in twelve minutes — break for a commercial and come back with the second twelve minutes of a half-hour show — than to go seven minutes, break; seven minutes, break; seven minutes, break. It is not aesthetically satisfying. It doesn't work. It doesn't allow you to develop dramatic storylines. So I kept the Japanese break points.

**SHEL:** Did you explain this to the various local stations? Did you get any disagreement with that?

**CARL:** I got a lot of flak, initially. And my point of view was: I am producing the show, and I am doing it a particular way. If you don't like that, you have editing devices and you can cut the show however you like. This is how I am presenting the show. You may reinterpret it any way you like. If you show it the way I am suggesting, here's all the set-up. If they don't like that, we send them an entire reel of bumpers and inserts so they can cut it anyway they want.

**SHEL:** What's your typical workday like?  
**CARL:** The typical day at Harmony Gold begins at nine in the morning, when they start recording in a particular sound studio, and the recording will go from nine in the morning to two-thirty the following morning, so that would be a seventeen hour day. In between, I sit in a six-hour session where I edit episodes. I have to supervise the recordings of actors in four studios. I have to meet with licensors and various merchandisers of the properties to discuss aspects of the show. I have to review scripts. I have to re-write and re-edit scripts that don't work. I write all the narration and all of the off-camera dialogue to create continuity, because I have so many different writers. I have to supervise what's called the lay-back so I can make sure that every aspect of the show's been covered for final distribution. It is a very long day. Most people wouldn't put that kind of effort into it.

**SHEL:** How many days a week?

**CARL:** Six.

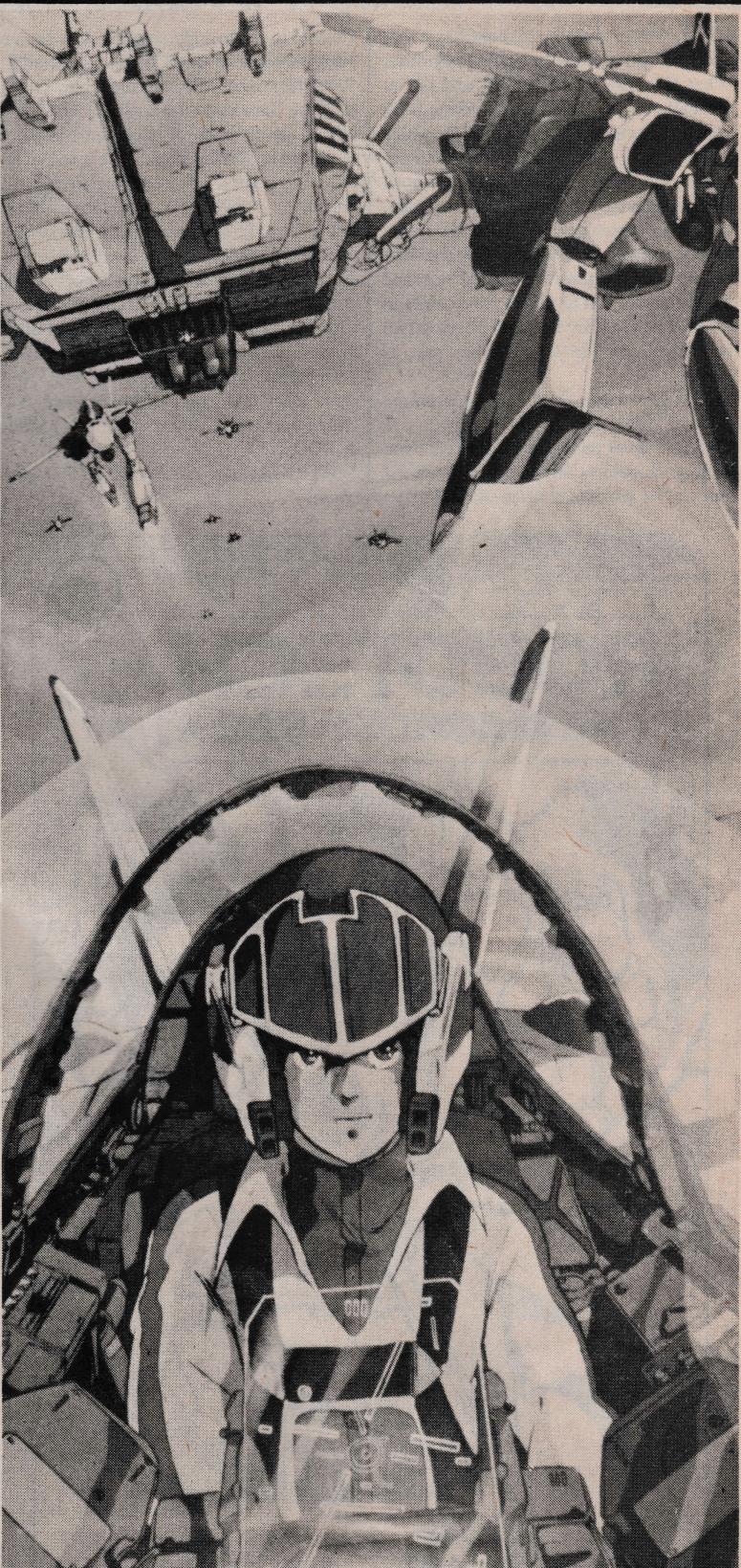
**SHEL:** Whew.

**CARL:** Well, we had to produce five shows a week for 85 shows to get done in six months. It was almost an impossible schedule. It was like live television. It is very complicated. And then on top of that, I started to write the comic book for the series which Comico is publishing. The goal there was to get the comic book off on the right foot in terms of what I was attempting to get into the television show.

**SHEL:** DC issued a comic called ROBOTECH DEFENDERS — was there any conflict with what Comico was doing, in terms of adapting MACROSS?

"Robotech" TM Revell, Inc.

© 1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold



# "It was only right to let Comico do what

**CARL:** There was no real conflict. It was a simple matter of understanding priorities. What Harmony Gold, Revell and all interested parties wanted was a comic book which reflected the television series which we were putting into syndication. The Comico plan was the most positive way to respond to the challenge of licensing a comics adaptation of a major new animated series due to be syndicated in continuity. Comico shifted gears and re-named their initial book and the characters in it to reflect the changes in ROBOTECH. They began to develop two new titles and the rest, as they say, is history.

**SHEL:** How can you hope to write all the ROBOTECH comics, Carl?

**CARL:** I never really intended to continue writing the comics for the full run. My intent was to start the concept off and allow

Comico to get an understanding of what the basic storyline of ROBOTECH was about. When they were able to locate writers such as **Mike Baron** and the art staff, which includes the diversity of talent necessary to do justice to the characters, I felt it was only right to let Comico do what they are in business to do — and that is to produce comics. It is going to be interesting to see how others interpret my concepts. The storyline is rather complex and there are some continuity holes created by the crazy quilt methods in which I had to cut the entire series together but, in general, I am certain that Comico will keep the spirit of the original Japanese design intact and continue to explore the "soap-opera-ish" drama which is created in ROBOTECH.

**SHEL:** How did the comic book come about?

**CARL:** We are doing something totally unique with Comico, in two senses. It is the first time that an independent comic-book publishing company has been able to license a major property, which is very unique. And the continuity plan, too, is unique.

**SHEL:** I understand that the Comico people were very excited. Did I read a press release where they are going weekly?

**CARL:** We are going bi-weekly with three separate titles which are going to inter-lock the story. It is very complex. It is a very unique opportunity for Comico. The thing that is fascinating is that each issue of the comic book relates to an individual television episode. That again makes it unique, so that each comic pictorializes an episode of the television show. What the writer of the comic book has to do, is really take the script and translate it, and the comic-book artist takes a time coded videocassette, watches it and, in tandem, they break down each half-hour episode into a comic. The thing that is difficult is to find drama in episodes that are basically talking heads — because there are talking-heads shows. There's where the versatility of the comics medium and the artists who work on it have an ability to transcend the television series and make more of a graphic statement out of stuff. So Comico is doing a real good job. They are doing something that has never been done before. They are working on it very hard. I think they are doing something that is totally unique.

**SHEL:** Carl, let's go back a little bit, and tell the readers what brought you to this point. When I met you, you were a clerk in a comic book store.

**CARL:** I was never a clerk in a comic book store. I was an owner.

**SHEL:** You worked for the American Comic Book Store in Westwood?

**CARL:** No, I was a part-owner.

**SHEL:** I understand that there's a lot that I don't know about you. I have seen you at conventions and you've worked in movies and films. You've written film articles, you are an expert on the film noir genre. Let me have your background. What were your interests as a youngster?

**CARL:** Same as most children, I guess. Never really obsessed with anything, more than just knowledge — I was a very academic child. I was into academics and sports. I was a tennis player when I was going through high school and college. I was a very studious young man. Eventually, after going through college, I became a librarian. I was a college librarian, and I was the curator of the Archive of Popular Culture at California State University for several years.



# they are in business to do — comics.”

**SHEL:** Was that your college?

**CARL:** No, I was at about eight different colleges. I was at UCLA, USC, California State University at Irvine, I did a tour up in the Boston area, Cambridge, I was at MIT and Harvard briefly. I studied diverse courses. I had an Aristotelian education but my degree is in the Theory of Criticism in the Visual Media. I am the only person who has that degree in the United States. Did my graduate work in American Studies, learned the value of popular culture. I am basically a cultural anthropologist — which is how it works out when you study American popular culture. Because of the work I did in the library as an archivist, this huge selection of material that they had, I became very immersed in animation and comics. I was the West Coast editor of a short-lived publishing company called Atlas Comics, which published a bunch of super-hero and adventure comics and then did black-and-white magazines.

**SHEL:** How did you meet David Alexander and Terry Stroud?

**CARL:** Terry was a student at California State University at the time I was working there. When Governor Reagan left and Jerry Brown became newly appointed to the governorship, my position at the school was blue pencilled because they thought it was not necessarily worthwhile. I had the opportunity to remain sort of as an acquisitions executive, but I decided to move on. At that time Terry Stroud was kind enough to offer me a position in his company which I accepted, and sort of moved through and became a minor partner in the American Comic Book Company. They were primarily a mail order business, and I created the American Comic Book Company's retail outlets all over Southern California. Then I eventually went into my own business, where I created comic art galleries, and in the meantime I wrote four or five books on film. I worked as a marketing and promotional co-ordinator for various film studios — worked at M-G-M, worked for Dino DeLaurentiis, worked for Ivan Wrightman Productions.

**SHEL:** What did you do for DeLaurentiis?

**CARL:** One of my closer friends in the industry is Charlie Lippincott who I met in 1976 — he used to work for George Lucas and eventually went to work for DeLaurentiis and eventually M-G-M, and Charlie always recognized that I had some germ of creativity in the back of my head and would hire me to do advance research on projects. I started working on a DUNE concept with David Lynch when they first selected him. Did some research for Dino DeLaurentiis when he was interested in some material for DR.STRANGE. I was like the library. I

1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold Art © 1985 Comico



Art by Byers and Poston, from ROBOTECH: THE MACROSS SAGA 4.

would create the bank of material and give it to them, and they would decide whether or not they wanted to make a film. I worked at M-G-M doing a very simple assessment of motion pictures. I would sit in a room and we would watch it and we would decide if it were acceptable for M-G-M to purchase or not. Then I was working as a marketing and promotional coordinator for Nelvana Animation up in Canada. And it was simply a matter trying to determine the inherent strengths and weaknesses of various properties and how to exploit them — using the word exploit in a good way — in various markets or areas. I finally became

really bored with doing that, because it is the concept of a creative mind trapped in a situation where the relative success of what you do is measured in the box office receipts, not really in the intelligent thinking. So I stopped doing this, and did not want to work in the motion picture industry — and then was approached by Harmony Gold to become their production executive for television. What that means is that I am the person in charge of doing all of their production and conceptualization.

**SHEL:** Who owns Harmony Gold?

**CARL:** Harmony Gold is an international company that is privately owned.

# "I am producing a ROBOTECH feature film that will fall into continuity of the TV series."

**SHEL:** You don't want to mention their names?

**CARL:** It is really not germaine. It is a growing company very similar to, let's say, Lorimar. Harmony Gold is a privately owned corporation. It is very similar to the DeLaurentiis situation. You have people that are independently producing films and we now have our own distribution company and our own syndication company — we're basically doing everything in-house to make sure that everything is done the way that we prefer it to be done.

**SHEL:** As a scholar and a redesigner of other people's work, do you ever have the desire to create a character on your own from scratch?

**CARL:** Oh yes. Believe me, when you see what we've done with ROBOTECH, it is all created from scratch. I would say that the personalities and the development is created from scratch, and the stories and the situations are created from scratch — so, in that sense, I am satisfying my need for creativity unlike, let's say, creating SUPERMAN the way Siegel and Schuster did.

**SHEL:** You don't have a hidden desire to add a new character to the world?

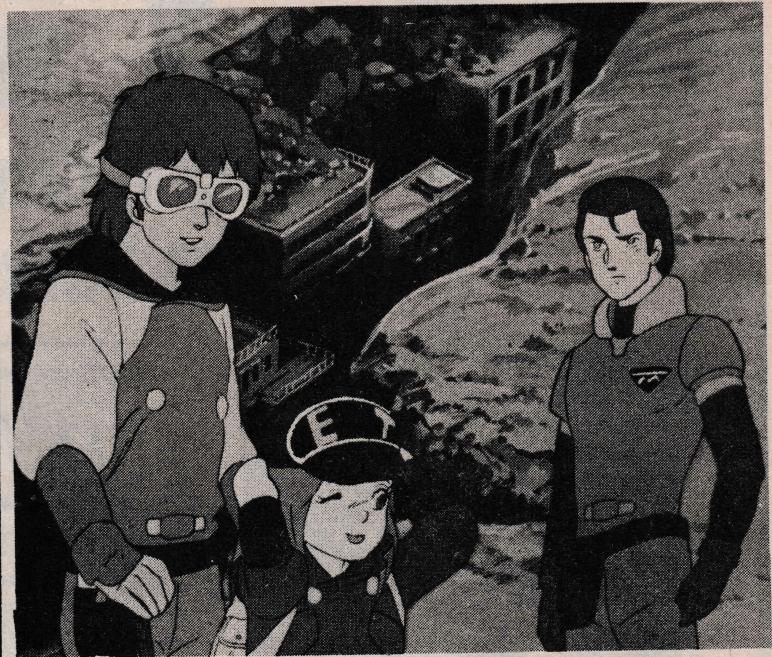
**CARL:** No. To my way of thinking the story is the thing, the development of drama. Whether I create a character like Indiana Jones — it's not important to me. The importance is to successfully convey the characteristics of your creation to the audience and get them into it. That's all I think entertainment is about — just to convey the situations and the personalities and make everyone believe. If people believe in your characters and what they are doing, then you are successful. That's my goal.

**SHEL:** What can we expect of you in the future, Carl?

**CARL:** At Harmony Gold, in the next year, we have undertaken the virtually impossible task of translating CAPTAIN HARLOCK into English. CAPTAIN HARLOCK was probably one of the most famous Japanese creations by a man named Kenji Matsumoto. He is responsible for creating GALAXY EXPRESS, SPACE CRUISER YAMATO, CAPTAIN HARLOCK, QUEEN MILLENIUM, etcetera. So Harmony Gold has set about the task of changing CAPTAIN HARLOCK into a syndicated television series. The difficulty again in doing this is that there are not sixty-five episodes of CAPTAIN HARLOCK — there are forty two — so we selected another Matsumoto series called QUEEN MILLENIUM. We will interface the two into a single series called CAPTAIN

"Robotech" TM Revell, Inc.

1985 Tatsunoko/Harmony Gold



HARLOCK AND THE QUEEN OF A THOUSAND YEARS, which will tell another science fiction story — once again in the spirit of the Japanese Matsumoto's creations as reinterpreted through Western eyes.

I am also right now becoming a film producer. I am producing a ROBOTECH feature film which will fall into the continuity of the ROBOTECH television series. I am involved in producing original animation and live-action. So Harmony Gold and I are taking it step by step. We're taking it

as a family. It is a very unique situation. Everybody has a desire to work together with common goals, with no ego problems. We just move along on works that are aesthetically pleasing.

**SHEL:** And as long as the public accepts it, as they are obviously accepting this, it looks like your future is pretty secure.

**CARL:** I hope that people will like what we are doing — because we make the films for our audience, we don't make the films for ourselves.

**SHEL:** Carl, are you a reader of COMICS INTERVIEW?

**CARL:** Oh yes. What I like about COMICS INTERVIEW is that you do not maintain a basis in terms of the people that you talk to — you talk to people in the industry who produce the stuff on every level and that gives a broad overview of what the comics field is doing, in general. You do not just go for the people that are the most visible. You don't go for the peak response — you go for the meat-and-potatoes people who are really the heart and soul of comics. I think that is the important thing about COMICS INTERVIEW, as opposed to the other comics-related magazines which are all good in their own right, but none have the handle on reality in terms of the industry.

**SHEL:** Well, the historian part of me likes working for this publication — I am one of the new interviewers. Carl, thanks again for your time.



Bioroid Terminator

Basically a policing unit used by the Robotech Masters to keep the malfunctioning Clone population to a minimum. The terminator also functions as an elite guard for the private quarters of the Robotech Elders (contemporaries of the original Zor).